

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN JO 04249 070058Z

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8527

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 4249

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CS

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ODUBER COMMENTS PUBLICLY ON VESCO MATTER

REF: SAN JOSE 4248

1. FOLLOWING ARE OUR COMMENTS ON REFTEL. THE EMBASSY HAS ALREADY RECEIVED ONE INQUIRY ("LA REPUBLICA") ASKING FOR COMMENT ON THE PRESIDENT'S CHARACTERIZATION OF OUR 1973 EXTRADITION ATTEMPT. WE HAVE THUS FAR AVOIDED COMMENT, BUT MORE INQUIRIES ARE INEVITABLE HERE AND PROBABLY IN THE U.S., AND DEPARTMENT'S GUIDANCE IS URGENTLY NEEDED. CLARLY A PUBLIC EMBASSY POSITION IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS IS NOT DESIRABLE, BUT MAY BE JUDGED NECESSARY IN VIEW OF PRESS INTEREST AND HIS DIRECT SUGGESTION THAT THE USG ACTED IN BAD FAITH IN 1973. THIS KIND OF ALLEGATION QUESTIONING THE USG'S MOTIVES IN OUR UNSUCCESSFUL EXTRADITION ATTEMPT IS NOT NEW AS THE DEPARTMENT IS WELL AWARE, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IT HAS COME PUBLICLY FROM A HIGH OFFICIAL SOURCE. FOR THE USG TO EFFECTIVELY REFUTE THIS ASSERTION IT WOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE EMBASSY PRESS OFFICER TO SAY SIMPLY THAT THE EMBASSY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE ACTED IN GOOD FAITH. NOR WOULD IT BE CONVINCING, OR EVEN WISE FOR THE USG TO EVEN INDIRECTLY CONTRADICT PRESIDENT ODUBER UNLESS THE STATEMENT IS FROM A SUFFICIENTLY HIGH LEVEL U.S. OFFICIAL TO ASSURE ITS CREDIBILITY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN JO 04249 070058Z

2. REGARDING ODUBER'S MOTIVES IN TAKING THE POSITION THAT THE EXTRADITION ATTEMPT WAS PURELY A MANIFESTATION OF U.S.

INTERNAL POLITICS, WE TEND TO THE BELIEF THAT THE PUBLIC AND POLITICAL SENTIMENT AGAINST VESCO HAS NOW BUILT UP SUFFICIENTLY TO MOVE ODUBER TO TRY TO SHIFT THE BLAME FOR VESCO'S PRESENCE FROM HIS GOVERNMENT AND FIGUERES BACK TO THE U.S. THIS INTERPRETATION ASSUMES THAT ODUBER KNOWS FULL WELL THAT THE USG MADE A LEGITIMATE TRY TO EXTRADITE VESCO. ON THE OTHER HAND, ODUBER MAY HAVE COME TO BELIEVE GENUINELY THAT THE USG'S EXTRADITION ATTEMPT WAS DESIGNED TO FAIL. HE HAS SUGGESTED THIS SEVERAL TIMES PRIVATELY, AND ONCE IN HIS LETTER TO VESCO DELIVERED IMMEDIATELY BEFORE HE TOOK OFFICE. EITHER HYPOTHESIS IS PLAUSIBLE, GIVEN THE FACTS OF THE DEEP VESCO INVOLVEMENT IN THIS COUNTRY'S POLITICS. HOWEVER, NOTING PRESIDENT ODUBER'S PROVEN RELUCTANCE TO BUCK EX-PRESIDENT FIGUERES, HIS FULL UNDERSTANDING OF THE USG'S INTEREST IN VESCO GAINED FROM BRIEFINGS AND DOCUMENTS, HIS GROWING PROBLEM WITH PUBLIC OPINION OVER THE ISSUE, AND HIS PERSONAL INCLINATION TO TRY TO SIDESTEP UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS, WE TEND TO BELIEVE THE PRESIDENT IS TRYING TO SHIFT THE BLAME.

3. WHETHER OR NOT DEPARTMENT DECIDES THAT US SHOULD MAKE PUBLIC STATEMENT, WE BELIEVE THAT CHARGE SHOULD ATTEMPT SEE ODUBER VERY SOON TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT. REQUEST INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDANCE ON THIS PRESENTATION.
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